UNDERSTANDING LEADERSHIP'S ROLE WITH EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Understanding Leadership's Role with Employee Engagement

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CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

Signed: _____

Abstract

The Dallas Fort Worth (DFW) International Airport Board has a vision of connecting the world. To accomplish this, it is important that each employee be engaged and belief in the organizational drivers and beliefs. This research addresses a problem related to employee engagement and why the DFW Airport Fire Department's (DFWFD) employee engagement fell below the organizations expectations of all departments. The purpose of this research was to gain an understanding of leadership's role with regard to employee engagement. A descriptive research methodology was utilized to answer the following research questions: What is employee engagement? What is private sector organization's leadership doing to engage employees? What is other fire service organization's leadership doing to engage employees? What leadership style(s) are appropriate with engaging employees? What leadership behaviors are required to engage the employees in their career and in the DFWFD?

A vast amount of literature on leadership was reviewed for relevance toward leadership and employee engagement. The data researched defined employee engagement, explained leadership styles and elements of leadership behaviors that impact employee engagement. Research was conducted through questionnaires and interviews of private sector and fire service leaders on actions related to leading toward a fully engaged workforce.

Results indicated that there is a need for consistent leadership within the DFWFD and the communication of a clear understanding of organizational culture. Leadership style and behavior has direct impact upon employee engagement therefore it is important that each leader have a clear understanding of their role as it relates to employee engagement. It is recommended by this author that leaders within the DFWFD align with the Airport's vision, lead with one voice, attending periodic meetings on vision and goals, and attending mentoring sessions with

supervisors. It is important that leadership involve the employee creating an environment of

learning and growing; for one-self and the organization.

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Introduction

Leadership at every level is crucial to the functionality, consistency, and performance of the organization. Leaders with loyal followers have a greater chance of attaining exceptional outcomes with employees focused toward one vision (Brown, 2006). For an organization to succeed in today's work environment it must foster employee engagement and leaders will need to create an environment so that each individual employee buys in and takes ownership in the organization and themselves (Baumruk, 2006). DFW Airport Board recognized the importance of employee engagement, focused on goal setting, and implemented initiatives to capture the hearts and minds of their most valuable asset; the employee. Effective leadership accompanied with managerial skills is a combination that can excel employees in performing at a higher level (Goldbach, 2005).

The problem is that the DFW Airport Fire Department encountered employee engagement measurements below the Airport Board's expectations of all departments within the organization. The DFWFD looked inward to identify the root cause and how to improve the overall engagement measures. To that end, the purpose of this research was to gain an understanding of leadership's role with regard to engaging the employees in the DFWFD.

A descriptive research methodology was utilized to answer the following research questions: What is employee engagement? What is private sector organization's leadership doing to engage employees? What is other fire service organization's leadership doing to engage employees? What leadership style(s) are appropriate with engaging employees? What components of leadership are required to engage the employees in their career and in the DFWFD?

For each of the questions, sources on leadership were reviewed from all walks of life; private and career with a look at motivational views on leadership and its relevance toward employee engagement. Interviews of top managers within private organizations and fire service organizations were conducted to understand what is being done as it relates to leading an engaged workforce. This included data research related to leadership styles and components of leadership styles that exist to promote employee engagement. Data gathered through the annual Airport Board questionnaire was analyzed as it related to leadership and employee engagement.

Background and Significance

The Dallas Fort Worth International Airport Board became reality in 1968 and is known today as the economic engine of North Texas. Opening in 1973 and owned by the cities of Dallas and Fort Worth, DFW Airport is now the third busiest airport in the world. The airport is located in two counties, Dallas and Tarrant, and is within the city limits of five neighboring cities; Grapevine, Coppell, Irving, Euless, and Fort Worth. Currently ranked second to Denver International Airport, DFW Airport sits on over 18,000 acres. Airfield traffic reaches almost 60 million passengers annually. Over 2,000 are employed by the Airport Board to maintain the airfield, operations, and provide the best customer service.

The Department of Public Safety (DPS) has approximately 500 employees responsible for Police, Fire and Special Services. Fire Services is comprised of 190 personnel certified by the State of Texas as Structural and Airport Firefighters and by the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) as Emergency Medical Technicians (basic thru licensed paramedic). These personnel are also responsible for hazmat and rescue responses on and off the airport.

In 2003, the public safety concept experienced a paradigm shift resulting in a split among career paths of police and fire personnel. This change impacted personnel in a variety of ways to

include decisions as to whether he/she would remain police and or fire commissioned. At the same time the fire service transitioned from a police schedule to a traditional 24/48-hour work cycle. So, those employees assigned to the fire service dealt with a significant amount of change in one short year. However, this change brought about new challenges and opportunities for the leaders at DFW Airport and the Department of Public Safety.

For years, the executive staff at DFW International Airport has embraced the vision of connecting the world. As you might imagine, air travel arriving and departing from the airport can do just that on a daily basis. However, to really capture the sense of the vision "Connecting the World" DFW Airport Executive Team identified four key results; to be cost competitive, gain a high level of customer satisfaction, and maintain operational excellence through engaged employees. Although no easy task, the leadership of DFW Airport worked to identify how to accomplish these drivers through annual strategic goals and initiatives.

One of the four key results "Employee Engagement" was introduced to the employees focusing on five beliefs: Innovation Wins, Reach Out, Own it, Step Up, and You're Important (DFW Airport, 2012). Through these beliefs, many programs were implemented and completed involving employees to instill the concept of a "learning and growing" environment. An annual survey conducted by a third party measuring employee engagement provided the executives with the level of engagement in each department. In one specific area of leadership, DFWFD scored lower in the immediate supervisor and employee rational commitment.

Once the survey results were published department heads were tasked with creating their own employee engagement initiatives for the following year aligning with the key result. These initiatives were based on the data received from the annual survey and targeted areas of needed improvement. DFW Airport Fire Department senior leadership distributed initiatives each year

that addressed areas such as communication, training, partnerships, and mentoring. Each initiative had a goal and purpose followed by actions deemed necessary to accomplish what was expected to increase employee engagement in the DFWFD.

With each passing year, the engagement results for DFWFD increased with the participation and index percentages on the rise. Core engagement questions revolved around efforts with strategy, empowerment, teamwork and collaboration, development, support, and recognition (DDI, 2007). Based on the results, to succeed with meeting the employee engagement goals of the Airport Board it was clear that consistent leadership was needed if all employees in the DFWFD were to be engaged and performing at their greatest ability. It is all too important for leaders today to gain an understanding of the baseline of engagement before any leadership strategies can be implemented to foster engagement (Crimmon, 2009).

In an ever-changing environment, it is critical for managers to provide the leadership needed to facilitate engagement among the employees. When compared to others, DFWFD leadership's measurements remained lower than other departments. It is critical today for any organization to hire and retain employees who are engaged in working toward the mission and goals. A combination of an employee's value is a combination of their personal qualities, experiences, and motivations. Their ability to meet the demands of the job and perform with excellence can result in a higher level of service to the public (Smith, 2010).

For years, employees assigned to the fire operations division were responsible for staffing the jail and conducting book-in procedures. As public safety officers, it just seemed like the right thing to do. It was accepted as part of the job. The assignment had huge impact on employee morale and employee engagement, especially for those hired after the transition to the 24-hour shift. Leadership was challenged with why this assignment remained with the firefighters after

police and fire services were now split. Firefighters have trouble understanding why it was acceptable for them to serve as jailers with the risk of impacting response to emergency calls. Leaders provide explanations as to why the assignment existed, but it was evident that the firefighters were not buying in to the reasons. This caused confusion and a lack of engagement among the firefighters. This example, as with others have negative impact on the engagement level of employees resulting in a lack of commitment and a reduction in performance of the employee.

Even today, with the uncertainties of the airline industry employees may feel less stable in their jobs. The work environment is experiencing disconnect among managers and those in the field. Therefore consistent leadership is needed to maintain a level of engagement among the workforce (Baumruk, 2006). Pride and ownership of the employees was impacted and this can potentially be seen by the tenants and passengers of the airport. A strong, consistent leadership is needed to facilitate a new commitment and energy among the employees. A continued disconnect among leadership at the mid-level ranks has huge impact on the cohesiveness of the organization.

This author understands the value of employee engagement. As a leader, it is my responsibility to foster engagement and place emphasis on those areas in need of improvement so that the DFWFD can continue to learn and grow with the ever-changing environment. Throughout the past few years employee engagement has improved among fire services with the area of leadership falling behind when compared to the other areas surveyed. Management continues to embrace the idea, but fails to understand the roles leadership must foster to drive each employee to full engagement.

Upon completion of the National Fire Academy's Executive Leadership (EL) course, I gained a greater respect and understanding of the meaning of leadership at the executive level. Today's fire service needs leaders who possess the energy and communication skills to energize the workforce, maintain cohesiveness among the ranks, and obtain high performance levels through employee engagement. Leaders too, must "own their piece of the mess" (FEMA, 2011, Unit 1). A continued look at building trust and gaining buy-in is needed to facilitate engagement among the employees.

Understanding the role of leadership as it relates to employee engagement is in direct support of one of the United States Operational Objectives "to improve the fire and emergency service's professional status" (FEMA, 2011). Leaders in the fire service must remain engaged in their jobs. To the point, their own development supports and facilitates the employees to be proactive and energized about what they do and the quality in which they do it. This can be accomplished through involving employees in their job in every way imaginable. Do this and it may just transform an ordinary organization into an extraordinary organization (Smith, 2010).

<div align="center">Literature Review</div>

Employee engagement is increasingly becoming an initiative among many public sectors and private sectors abroad. The thought of engaging employees is not a new concept recently placed on the doorsteps of businesses, but one of many motivational factors that we have known for years (Esty & Gewitz, 2008). DFW Airport Board is no different in that is has become increasingly important to engage employees in the workplace. The question is how does an organization engage their employees, how is it measured, and what role does the leader play in gaining full involvement? First, let us take a look at what employee engagement is.

According to Robinson, Perryman, & Hayday, (2004), employee engagement is "a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its values". The organization too must capture the culture of engagement, create opportunity for development of its employees and foster an effective communication. One might think of employee engagement as employee satisfaction. Employee satisfaction is a component of total engagement that can be measured however the outcome will lack total results due to its narrow view (Robinson, Perryman, & Hayday, 2004). One other way involves the old adage of "we will know it when we see it". One other can be defined as the willingness and ability to perform at a level resulting in organizational success. And, each employee can perform at different levels of being energetic about what they do and the quality at which they do it. (Esty & Gewitz, 2008).

Job performance is a result of the engaged employee. That said, according to Gallup Management (2003) "employees who are engaged in their work and have buy-in to the visions, mission, and goals of the organization are much likelier to excel in job performance". This in itself has positive impact on the bottom line, which are factors such as increased revenue, productivity and loyalty among the internal and external customers. Employees should understand what is expected of them in their job. It is important for employees to have opportunity for development and have the ears of their leaders with respect to their ideas or opinions (Gallup Management, 2003).

A determining factor in improving employee engagement is the culture of the organization. According to Compton & Granito, (2002), the culture of the organization is just one of four other factors that need to be in alignment for an organization to remain vibrant and successful. The other factors include marketplace, strategy (i.e. vision, mission, and goals), and leadership style. As with the culture, leadership must evolve as the organization evolves. As

change occurs, leadership must be prepared to meet those expectations of the organization and the community (Cochran, 2006, p. 250-251). It is important for organizations including DFWFD to communicate to its employees the value of understanding the "why" and "how" as it relates with remaining aligned with the organizations vision, mission, and goals.

The behavior of the organization as a whole has significant impact on its leaders and each individual employee alike (Brown & Harvey, 2006). Leaders provide the direction when addressing the problems normally found within organizational cultures. On occasion, the issue or problem being address may be what is perceived to be the problem. Therefore, it is critical that leaders have a thorough understanding of the cultural issue at hand prior to any active effort. For an organization culture to remain vibrant and leaning forward, the leaders must also have true understanding in how to recognize the specific needs adapting accordingly to a successful end (Cochran, 2006, p. 255).

A variety of research studies identify organizational change as an option to increase organizational efficiency. Knowing the purpose is to increase the productivity through energized, viable workers who are able to increase performance using a creative and innovative means to stretch success beyond the norm. The challenge is and has always been in how the organizational change is managed for an increase in organizational and individual effectiveness. Leaders play an important role in the success of change therefore one must understand the changes needed and the perceived outcome of the change itself (Brown & Harvey, 2006).

Without change, organizations would at best remain status quo and so would the performance of its employees. So, leaders are critical in facilitating the change required for success. Leadership styles are just as critical for managers to succeed in a successful organizational change. How leaders provide direction, coach, correct, and motivate employees

has direct impact on the organization and whether its employees take ownership and engage in their work (Lewin, 1939). Early research on leadership styles dates back to the military handbook. According to the U.S. Army (1973), there are three styles of leadership: (a) authoritarian (autocratic), (b) participative (democratic), (c) Delegative (free reign). Good leaders tend to integrate all three styles with one style being primary. As with the leaders at the DFWFD, other organizations could benefit with having leaders who can integrate the three styles to engage employees. The connection and communication between the leader and the employee is paramount to effective decision-making to meet the expectations and goals of the organization (Hitt, 1998).

To understand the role of a leader one must define leadership. Northhouse, (2007) defines leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal". For years there has been a debate among many that leaders are born, not made and vice versa. Is it knowledge and skills or is it merely individual traits? Jago, (1982) calls these two theories "process leadership and trait leadership". Process leadership involves knowledge and skills while trait leadership is influenced by his or her beliefs, values, ethics, and character. Like DFWFD, organizations today are challenged with leading their employees in a consistent, effective manner. A combination of skills, knowledge, and attributes are all integral parts to a leader. One might refer to this style as situational leadership.

Approaching leadership through recognition of the situation is dependent upon an interaction between the leader and the employees or team. Knowing the team or individual allows the leader to adapt to the situation or to the person's behavior (Goldbach, 2005, p. 227). An effective leader should be innovative. Meaning, one should be committed to continuous improvement of the organization. The leader must encourage honesty, scan the environment for

future changes, and never be content with the status quo. According to Goldbach, (2005) these attributes of an innovative leader must reside within all ranks of the organization. The innovative leader also has courage to stay on course and the integrity to do what they have promised to the team or individual. Employee engagement is dependent upon the confidence and competence of the organization's leadership. A number of leadership styles and qualities exist in the workplace today. With each arise the need for a trusting environment with the approach creating opportunities and collaborating with others (Covey, 2006).

In learning about leadership one must understand the relationship between leaders and their followers. It is important for leaders to build those relationships and team environments to foster engagement among the organization. One look back in history and the study of leadership resulted in research centered round two types of leaders; the transactional leader and the transformational leader. The transactional leader gains understanding in what the follower's value and then provides such as reward for their work. Whereas the transformational leader uses influence to set the standard for performance with a shared vision and strategy (FEMA, 2011, Unit 5).

Hitt (1998) notes, "The essence of leadership is found in a person's ability to move an organization successfully from state A to state B; that is to a higher level of performance. He or she must transfer vision into significant actions". This quote from Hitt reinforces the need for leaders to establish a supportive environment with his or her employees. The ability to do so will engage the employees to an all new motivational level. Each employee's job performance is linked to the leader's ability to provide opportunity for growth through challenging each with meaningful and valued work. Leaders who treat their employees with respect will in turn receive

respect. Any damaging conduct by the leader in this area will most certainly have negative

impact on the individual and ultimately the organization (Compton, 2006).

Research indicates that organizations who promote engaging the employee to the extent

that "speaking up" is a normal environment. Employees must believe that their ability to speak

up during meetings to share ideas for projects and or reasons why a specific project needs more

time will only result in a means of solving a problem or work more efficient. There must be no

sign of corrective action or closed minded behavior among the leaders for this to be successful

(Edelman, Hiltabiddle, & Manz, 2008). It is equally important that the leader promote healthy

conflict among his or her employees or team. Leaders will need to demonstrate a patient

demeanor when others among the team are engaged in conflict. Sometimes, it is important to

allow the conflict to resolve itself. Although tough for some leaders to do, this may very well be

the time frame where the individual or team grows and learns a great deal through the conflict.

This environment may be somewhat uncomfortable for the leader, but may very well result with

the truth (Lencioni, 2002).

Connecting the link between the leader and the employee with a focus on organizational

success will create a positive and cultivating environment. DFW FD, as well as other

organizations should seek the truth at all levels, managers and employees. Truth as to where the

answers lie as it relates to the leadership style and the impact it has on the climate of the

organizational culture. Leadership is about vision; a vision where everyone can openly speak up

and be heard and a climate where the facts can be addressed in an open forum. Four practices

found in Collins, (2001) are: (a) lead with questions, not answers, (b) engage in dialogue and

debate, not coercion, (c) conduct autopsies, without blame, (d) build "red flag" mechanisms.

These best practices allow for leaders to step into an arena where engaging the employees provides for truth and self-purpose.

Leaders face challenges that will test his or her abilities daily. Adapting to those challenges and leading through them will demonstrate the confidence needed to inspire those watching. Connecting to each employee in such a way that everyone encountered will hear your purpose shared, the challenges faced, and the means of communication. (Heifetz, Grasgow, & Linsky, 2009). A common mistake is a sudden change in direction or the case of leaders sending inconsistent messages down the chain. It is critical for the organizations to remain clear in their vision and with solid trust among the leaders and followers. Leaders who challenge the employees to engage in decision-making will result in a positive outcome even at the lowest level in the organization (Esty & Gewitz, 2008).

Research resulted in identifying measuring tools to provide organizations with employee engagement levels. DFW Airport was no different as a strategy for engagement was rolled out along with an annual survey. A third party corporation was hired to administer the survey in 2007. Development Dimensions International (DDI) conducted multiple sessions with leaders among airport departments. The sessions involved sending one clear message "engagement = employees + leaders = organization" (DDI, 2007). It is imperative that organizations effectively communicate the vision, mission, and goals of the organization clearly. The focus was clearly on engagement and not satisfaction, and leaders are motivators who provide the direction for each employee for increased job performance and problem solving (DDI, 2007)

Review of literature resulted in a vast amount of information and data related to employee engagement and the roles leaders must understand to engage a workforce through clear, consistent leadership that facilitates full engagement. Organizations succeed due to its

workforce working toward the same vision. It is the leaders who pull the team in one direction for exceptional results. Without the leadership, the organization would fail resulting in potential revenue loss or poor service delivery. In either case, the organization suffers and the customers suffer. Influence in today's organization is critical as leaders communicate expectations, align the person with the task, and create an environment where teams excel through mutual respect and cooperation. The empowered employee allows individuals to move forward without fear to solve problems, make decisions, and accept responsibility. Organizations reach excellence through the combination of effective leadership and engaged employees who are empowered at every level (Brown & Harvey, 2006).

Procedures

This research project utilized a descriptive research method to compile information and data relevant to how leaders within an organization can better understand their role with employee engagement. The focus of the research was to collect and examine behaviors and actions of leaders, leadership styles, and how each impact employee engagement. The research began in September 2011 through multiple visits to the Learning Research Center at the National Fire Academy. Time was spent to list resources available related to employee engagement, leadership styles, and those leadership behaviors that have positive influence on engaging employees. This search aided the author in answering questions one, four, and five: (1) What is employee engagement? (4) What leadership style(s) are appropriate with engaging employees? (5) What leadership behaviors are required to engage the employees in their career and in the DFWFD?

Information related to employee engagement, leadership styles, and leadership behavior was found through a search of books, articles, and other literature sources. Notes were taken

along with resource listings of web sites associated with leadership and engagement. Specific areas discovered through this search at the Learning Research Center resulted in a good foundation for understanding how the behaviors and styles of leader within the DFW FD can have impact on engaging the employees. Fully engaged leaders are vital for fully engaged employees and why this is critical for organizational performance and success.

Further literature review was conducted once back at home and consisted of hours spent at the Fort Worth Library and the DFW Airport Human Resources library on leadership. A vast amount of information was collected from leadership books and leadership training course curriculum. A number of web searches provided information on employee engagement and their link to leadership. Search engines revealed several pieces of information related to leadership and followership, leadership styles and behaviors, and how each can either engage or disengage the employee. The research collected provided the author with a holistic view of leadership and how the leaders of an organization can have positive and or negative impact on the engagement, which can result in poor organizational performance to include loss of revenue or service.

Literature review revealed information on leadership at other private and public organizations however the majority collected for this research paper was through questionnaires and interviews. One such literature reviewed was the data presented to DFWFD (DDI, 2007) in 2007 on the form of results from an annual employee engagement survey. The survey measurements provide the organization with a baseline for overall engagement at DFWFD. DDI (2007) took an in-depth look at the organization's leadership, employee empowerment, teamwork, employee development, recognition programs, and efforts to align strategy with vision. DDI conducted the annual survey each year to date measuring employee engagement. All

surveys were collected and analyzed, however this author was denied approval to submit copies

of these surveys as appendixes in this paper due to the contractual agreement.

A questionnaire was created in November 2011 *(see Appendix A)* to obtain information

related to question two of this research paper: (2) What is private sector organization's leadership

doing to engage employees? Survey questions focused on leaders of private corporations abroad

and how each leader viewed employee engagement and its value in the organization. This author

wanted to identify what leaders of private organizations were doing to engage their employees.

The questionnaire was sent via email to five private corporations.   Understanding how leaders

impact engagement was the primary driver of the questionnaire. Five questions were asked of

those completing the questionnaire. A 14 day time frame was communicated with a deadline of

December 10, 2011. Results pertaining to this questionnaire can be found in *Appendix B*.

A questionnaire was created in November 2011 *(see Appendix C)* to obtain information

related to question two of this research paper: (3) What is other fire service organization's

leadership doing to engage employees? Survey questions focused on leaders of private

corporations abroad and how each leader viewed employee engagement and its value in the

organization. This author wanted to identify what leaders of other fire service organizations were

doing to engage their employees. The questionnaire was sent via email to five fire service

organizations. Understanding how leaders impact engagement was the primary driver of the

questionnaire. Five questions were asked of those completing the questionnaire. A 14 day time

frame was communicated with a deadline of December 20, 2011. Results pertaining to this

questionnaire can be found in *Appendix D*.

Like any other questionnaire, the potential for error and or misleading information is

possible due to the structure of the question and or the interpretation of the question by the

respondent. This is such the case with the research questions associated with these two questionnaires. There is no way to determine if any misinterpretation exists or errors due to the structure of the questions, however this author will assume all responded with honesty and accuracy while representing their organization.

An interview process involved reaching out internally and conducting interviews with 4 of the leaders assigned to DFWFD. The interviews were conducted in January 2012 in this author's office and consisted of asking four supervisors assigned to the Fire Service at DFW Airport 4 questions related to leadership and employee engagement. The purpose of the interviews was to identify what leaders of different levels at DFWFD perceived to be necessary to engage employees, what their role was to accomplish full engagement, and how leadership styles and behaviors impact employee engagement. The participants were handed the questions one at a time and asked to respond verbally. The author took notes and documented each answer. The following is a list of the four questions: (1) How would you describe your leadership style? (2) What does employee engagement mean to you? (3) What is your role as a leader with employee engagement? (4) What can the organization do to engage employees? The interviews were conducted one on one with each ranging in time of 30-60 minutes depending on the length of the answers. The participating ranks included Field Training Officer, Captain, Battalion Chief, and Assistant Chief. All interviews were completed within a 10-day period, January 10-20, 2012. Interview questions and answers can be found in *Appendix E.*

<div align="center">Results</div>

Research conducted via the internet throughout the project time frame rendered a significant amount of information related to employee engagement, leadership, and how a leader's behavior and style impacts employee engagement. In an effort to provide a thorough

description of the subject matter related to this research, multiple books and articles were reviewed, an interview of leadership assigned to DFWFD was conducted, and questionnaires were distributed and returned to the author. All data and information was collected and organized answering the five research questions.

When applying description research to answer question one, the author found an extensive number of resources defining employee engagement. The Learning Resource Center along with a number of books and internet sites provide the author with a clear understanding of the employee engagement and how it might impact the performance of personnel assigned to DFWFD. Employee engagement is a critical in sustaining a progressive culture of change within an organization. Many descriptions of employee engagement was discovered that supported a link of an employee's performance and commitment to organizational success (Brown & Harvey, 2006).

To answer research question #2, the author distributed a questionnaire to five leaders/managers in the private sector. 100% of the questionnaires were returned rendering the results found in *Appendix B* to the following questions: (1) In your opinion, what is employee engagement? (2) Does your organization value employee engagement? How so? (3) What role do you as a leader have with engaging the employees? (4) What behaviors do you as a leader believe is required to engage employees? (5) What steps have you and or your organization taken to engage employees?

Focusing on the answers of those leaders selected for this research, employee engagement is alive and continues to be an initiative among private organizations. Leaders identified a collective number of similar explanations as to what employee engagement is with the primary sense of what an employee does to assure the organization is successful; successful

being an organization with employees who perform well having positive impact on revenue. To do accomplish this, one answer to question #1 of the questionnaire is quoted as "Taking the time to explain what is needed for a job assignment". And, this is accomplished through employees committed in working hard at their job.

All five (100%) responded "yes" to question #2 implying that the organization values employee engagement. When asked how so, the answers tend to mirror each other in the sense of implementing programs to address and or measure performance, enhance recruitment strategies, and building alignment from top to bottom. Based on the answers, organizations seem to value employee engagement understanding that without it negative impact related to productivity, services, and revenue could occur.

To address what private sector leaders believe is their role with engaging employees, question #3 was answered by all respondents. Communication was a norm among all respondents and 80% of the respondents believed that taking corrective action on poor performers was necessary for an organization to fully engage the workforce. All agreed that providing essential resources was required so that each employee could do their job as effectively as possible. 60% of the respondents stated in some form that supporting the employee with gaining new knowledge and skills was a role each leader is responsible for daily.

Question #4 references behavior among leaders in the private organization. 80% replied with answers while 20% or 1 respondent choose not to by placing an N/A in the answer space. It is not known why this person chose not to answer the question. The other four respondents replied with answers related to remaining positive during tough times, being a good communicator, encourage teamwork, and manage things effectively. Other responses included behaviors of being humble and or strong when the situation arises for such and to always share

the organizations visions and goals. Above all, motivate your employees to do a good job and keep lines of communication open across the organization.

The final question of the questionnaire rendered 100% response as to steps leaders or the organization have taken to engage employees. Primarily, answers centered round programs and systems for change and leadership. New performance structures were mentioned along with recruitment strategies and processes that focused on behavior of employees. Effective communication among all levels was mentioned as in other questions. One organization scheduled monthly meetings with all supervisors to gain better understanding of engagement and the organizations vision. New performance evaluations were implemented in one organization surveyed.

To determine whether a difference existed between private sector and fire service organizations and answer question #3 of this research paper, the author asked the same five questions to five fire service leaders. 100% of the questionnaires were returned rendering the results found in *Appendix D* to the following questions: (1) In your opinion, what is employee engagement? (2) Does your organization value employee engagement? How so? (3) What role do you as a leader have with engaging the employees? (4) What behaviors do you as a leader believe is required to engage employees? (5) What steps have you and or your organization taken to engage employees?

Research questions 4 & 5 dealt with what leadership style(s) are appropriate with engaging employees and what leadership behaviors are required to engage the employees in their career and in the DFWFD? In addition to literature review for criteria related to leadership style and behavior the author conducted interviews to understand what leadership at DFWFD may perceive to be their role with regard to engaging employees. It is the leader's responsibility to act in a manner that fosters productivity and creates that environment that is in alignment with the organization. Consistency among leadership styles within an organization is critical to the success of the organization. Equally, behavior demonstrated through the leadership is just as important when setting the example for others to follow (Covert, 2010).

The interviews resulted in DFWFD supervisors answering the following four questions: (1) How would you describe your leadership style? (2) What does employee engagement mean to you? (3) What is your role as a leader with employee engagement? (4) What can the organization do to engage employees? Questionnaire results were documented and can be found with questions in *Appendix E.* Questions were asked of four existing levels of supervisors at DFWFD; Field Training Officer, Captain, Battalion Chief, and Assistant Chief.

The Field Training Officer shared the following answers to the questions above:

1. Flexible and instructional allowing the firefighter to learn from mistakes.
2. Communicating to all employees what they need to do as part of their job.
3. My role is to train firefighters to drive fire apparatus and assure each understand the importance of building locations, airport roadways, and response procedures. I try to keep them out of trouble.

4. We have always had really good equipment and apparatus so this helps a lot and is safe for our firefighters. Keeping everyone informed on what is coming down the pipe. Make sure we have the best compensation and benefits.

The Captain shared the following answers to the questions above:

1. Sometimes feels like a babysitter and has to provide specific instructions and watches others with a close eye.

2. Any person who does their job without being asked. Someone who is happy in their work and cooperates with me. Better communication.

3. To make sure everyone in my station remains safe. To built trust among the team at the station; understanding everyone's strengths and weaknesses. Keep the family environment. Be fair and impartial.

4. Enhanced training for everyone on employee engagement. Better rewards and recognition. Improve the performance measurement evaluation. True delegation and not just dumping things onto my plate.

The Battalion Chief shared the following answers to the questions above:

1. Feels more like a manager than a leader except when operating at an emergency scene as incident commander. Methodical and prefers to handle situations one at a time.

2. The terminology the organization uses in an attempt to get everyone on the same page. Those employees who buy in to the concept and do tasks outside of their job description are said to be engaged. Communication up and down the chain.

3. To lead by example and provide my shift with facts about what may be occurring within the fire department. Keep everyone safe. Build teamwork and mentor for

operational excellence. Keep everyone informed and focused on the initiatives of

the organization.

4. Do a better job at hiring the right person for the job. The organization should

    involve me more on other projects outside my job description. Implement a

    system that rewards those who excel and takes corrective action on those who are

    status quo.

The Assistant Chief shared the following answers to the questions above:

1. Situational. Has attended situational leadership and understands the importance of

    handling projects and personnel based on their talents and personality.

2. Employee engagement is not just knowing what is expected, but also going above

    and beyond toward meeting the airport vision. Whatever can be done to bring

    about synergy and increased performance will engage the employees. Effective

    communication.

3. To foster the core values of the department. Demonstrate that senior management

    is in line with the airport's vision. Be involved, be consistent, and encourage

    others to do a good job. Encourage excellent performance. Be committed and

    dedicated to the organization.

4. Recognize employees for a job well done. Assign employees into positions that

    best fit their talents and abilities. Improve communication at the higher

    management levels. Consistent communication from the top.

It was further noted by the author comments made by two of the four DFWFD

supervisors that in their opinion, trust of upper management was one significant obstacle

encountered at DFW Airport. A post discussion with each of the supervisors identified potential

individual emotions regarding trust may have been a factor in their remarks. Employees can sometimes become de-motivated due to paradigm shifts and or changes in organizational culture. For the most part, it is the lack of communication of such change that impacts trust among the workforce (Compton & Granito, 2002). Additionally, the author recognizes that the interpretation of each question or the fact that it may have been a poor written question resulted in the answers provided by the DFWFD leaders.

<p align="center">Discussion</p>

To understand a leader's role with employee engagement, the author analyzed criteria collected during literature review in combination with results from the two questionnaires and interviews of supervisors at DFWFD. Connecting employee engagement is vital to the success of a service oriented organization. To that end, it is critical that the leaders of the department are in alignment with the organizations strategic vision and goals (Black, 2007). In the case of DFWFD, an engaged employee, team, and leadership has direct impact on operational excellence.

The Dallas Fort Worth Fire Department at DFW International Airport is responsible for life safety and security at all levels and is regulated by a number of federal, state, and local agencies; specifically by the FAA. The FAA serves as the regulating authority for the airport through the Code of Federal Regulations, FAR 139 – Certification of Airports (Federal Aviation Administration, 2004). Failure to meet these requirements could have great fiscal and operational impact on DFW Airport and other international airports due to world travel. To accomplish operational excellence, DFWFD will need to engage employees to the potential required to sustain a high level of performance and quality customer service. To align employees with the

vision, mission, and goals of the organization it is important that leadership understand what they must do and how they must behave to accomplish full employee engagement.

Like with any organization, it was apparent to this author that any information collected related to understanding leadership styles and behavior would be valuable to understanding how it can impact the level of engagement among the employees. According to Ayers, (2011) the "leadership of the organization can either jointly drive toward an engaged workforce or diminish the effort of high performers". Leadership must devote additional time to communicating the organization's vision and how each employee plays an integral role it its success long term (Covert, 2010). With that in mind, it is clear that there needs to be a focus toward closing the gaps with building relationships among the leadership at DFWFW. A collaborative effort from senior management to build the trust among all supervisory ranks can result in a higher level of engaged employees.

Leadership and communication go hand in hand. Literature review supports this as well as the results from both the private and fire service questionnaires along with responses found in the interviews of DFWFD supervisors. Leaders who have the ability to communicate a clear message that truly aligns with the vision and mission of the organization is just once critical component. The ability to lead through change is another critical role of the leader (Covert, 2010). This holds true for the leaders at DFWFD. To first measure the engagement of employees, it is equally if not more important to measure the engagement of leadership and gain a thorough understanding of where the gaps exists. When comparing the answers of the different levels of supervisors at DFWFD there is an apparent disconnect in how each viewed employee engagement. There tends to be some confusion between employee engagement and employee satisfaction.

As previously mentioned DFWFD has an engagement plan and is measured annually. It is no secret among the department that engagement gaps are associated with the rational commitment to the immediate supervisors, which prompted this research. The styles and behaviors of leaders in DFWFD differ. It is this author's opinion that this is due to generational gaps, tenure, and basic ability to lead. A leader "involved" is a leader who is striving to do the right thing. Baumruk, (2006) explains that relationships, recognition, rewards, work-life balance, and the work itself can be affected substantially by the immediate supervisor. Employees want to be "in the loop" and this rests primarily with the leader's ability to engage the employees in brainstorming, decision-making, and change (Cochran, 2006).

The research found that employee engagement is a two way street. In some cases, it engagement depends upon the individual especially in regard to moral, feeling satisfied, passion, and dedication. However, the culture of the organization along with an array of other elements external to the employee has significant impact on the level of engagement as a whole (Smith, 2010). This too was seen when analyzing the answers of the leaders at DFWFD. A sense of trust and commitment from the top down as well as the bottom up requires consistency no different than the consistent and clear communication needed to cultivate an engaged environment.

The author found it interesting that the word "respect" never surfaced when reviewing the responses from the questionnaires and or the interviews. Equally, literature review had very little on the actual word. Is there no need to have mutual respect among all employees within the organization? I think so as I constantly engage in conversations with other employees and respect is almost always mentioned along with trust and dedication. Organizations understand that it is the dedicated employees in the workforce that keep them cutting edge and competitive. This

comes from employee engagement. It is important for employees to match their own personal purpose with the organization's vision (Black, 2011).

Literature revealed that compensation had little to do with engagement. This fact was reinforced with the answers from the questionnaires and interviews. Apparently, pay is not the issue when discussing the subject of employee engagement. Those surveyed and interviewed did address the elements of recruitment, retention, and career development as being important for the success of the organization with a focus on creating an environment conducive to the culture of the organization. For leaders to be successful with engaging the workforce they too need regular constructive feedback that is timely and focused and future-oriented (Black, 2011). Leadership must drive the train toward employee engagement.

<div align="center">Recommendations</div>

The research conducted as part of this project leads this author to believe that in order to foster an engaged workforce, leaders of the organization must a clear understanding in their role to accomplish full engagement at every level. Through the annual engagement surveys, DFWFD identified that there a gap among the ranks of leaders and their understanding of the organizations vision and culture. Moving forward, this author recommends the following in an effort to establish a holistic approach to increase the level of leadership effectiveness within the DFWFD. These recommendations, if followed through, will increase levels of engagement resulting in increased excellence among the employees, leaders, and the organization as each come together as one.

Not only should the vision and strategic plan of the DFW Airport be shared via written communication, it is just as important that the executive and senior leaders of the organization act on the plan and organizational beliefs. Periodic work sessions among executive, senior, and

middle management should be conducted to foster a collaborative approach to building leadership relations with a shared perspective of the strategy. The ability of leaders within DFWFD to gain understanding of the Airport's organizational culture and how their role aligns with the organization will build partnerships across organizational boundaries. Improved communication at the leadership ranks fosters open, two-way communication up, down, and across the DFWFD and the organization. Involving all ranks within DFWFD leadership in meetings related to vision and strategic direction builds a cohesive team working for the same outcome.

For engagement to increase, leadership at DFWFD must be consistent. Knowing that each individual leader has their own strengths and challenges, no one is exactly the same with regard to leadership style. A vast amount of literature is available to help guide and develop a leader. However, DFWFD can foster a culture of development for one style of leader that is best fitted for the leaders. This can be done through meetings among senior leaders in the fire department to determine what leadership style best fits the fire department. Then engage all ranks within fire services to share the vision as it relates to leadership style, gain buy-in, create goals and training curriculum, and agree upon a target date for completion of the training. A consistent annual revisit must be made to assure everyone remains on the same page. An orientation and training program will need to exist for new leaders.

Employees at the lowest level can have the greatest ideas on establishing policy, procedures, and proactive approaches toward issues facing the DFWFD. Leaders should involve their employees and teams with daily decision-making and problem solving. Leaders should coach for improved performance among employees, hold their employees accountable for their actions, recognize exceptional performers, support training and development activities, and

consistently grow the people around him or her. To do this, a mentoring program for leaders at DFWFD is recommended focusing on performance measurement, the importance of policy and procedures, how to create a climate where others want to do their best, and encourage others to think creatively and to take reasonable risks to achieve results. Leaders undergoing this type of development from supervisor above and across organizational boundaries will cross pollinate a collaborative effort with one voice.

An employee engagement tool already exists within the organization with regard to leadership's rational and emotional commitment to the organization; and how each measures up by his or her subordinates. As with subordinates, leaders must build alliances and champion the vision as one. The trust, respect, commitment, and consistency and lack thereof can be seen by every employee. An internal measurement survey on leadership within DFW FD created by the leaders in DFWFD would provide a benchmark of how the leaders measure up as a team. How well are the leadership engaged in becoming one voice could be viewed as being fully engaged.

Lastly, the research indicates that an engaged workforce results in organizational success through increased performance. The leaders at DFWFD can accomplish this through sharing the same vision as the organization. One voice doesn't have to be achieved through one leadership style, but a collaborative effort among leadership is needed to align and stretch the fire service at DFW Airport above and beyond the Airport's vision. Do this, and DFW Airport will recognize a fully engaged workforce working toward the same outcome; to be the best of the best. DFWFD can accomplish this through the Airports key results and the five beliefs: Innovation Wins, Reach Out, Own it, Step Up, and You're Important.

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Appendix A

Private Organization Leader Questionnaire

The questions below are part of a data collection process to identify the role of leadership as it relates to employee engagement. This research is part of a project I am required to complete as a student the Executive Fire Officer Program. In an effort to collect the data, I am asking your support by completing the questionnaire below. I thank you for your support in advance and I will gladly share the results upon completion.

1. In your opinion, what is employee engagement?

2. Does your organization value employee engagement?

3. If so, what role do you as a leader have with engaging the employees?

4. What behaviors do you as a leader believe is required to engage employees?

5. What steps have you and or your organization taken to engage employees?

Appendix B

Private Organization Leader Questionnaire Results

Question # 1

In your opinion, what is employee engagement?

100% of the respondents returned answers to this question. The following is a list of those

answers:

What I do to help the organization be successful. Being involved in impacting the company's

productivity in every way possible. What I can do to assure that the department I work in makes

money. Working hard all the time. Taking the time to explain what is needed for a job

assignment. Someone who is committed to their job.

Question # 2

Does your organization value employee engagement? How so?

100% of the respondents replied with "yes". The following is a list of those answers:

My organization consistently monitors engagement levels through surveys. Specific engagement

programs are implemented to increase engagement. Engagement is a category on the

performance evaluation. Organization works to encourage employees to develop in their skills. A

consistent message is share related to the organization's vision.

Question # 3

What role do you as a leader have with engaging the employees?

100% of the respondents replied with various means of engaging employees. The following is a

list of those answers:

To communicate what is expected of the employee. To take corrective action with the employee when required. Be committed to the job and lead by example. Provide the employee with the resources needed to do the job. Support the employee with gaining new skills and knowledge; training. Encouragement and recognition. To be consistent. Be fair.

Question # 4

What behaviors do you as a leader believe is required to engage employees?

80% of the respondents replied with answers associated with leadership behaviors required to engaging employees. One of the respondents placed N/A in the answer box. The following is a list of the answers:

Leaders should remain positive when the times are tough. A good communicator. Motivate your employees. Encourage teamwork and share the mission and goals. Build lines of communication across the organization. Be humble when needed and strong when needed. Manage things effectively.

Question # 5

What steps have you and or your organization taken to engage employees?

100% of the respondents replied with various means of engaging employees. The following is a list of those answers:

Training programs on change and leadership. Implementation of new performance evaluations. Enhanced health and safety programs. Recruitment strategies focused on behaviors. Opening lines of communication. Monthly meetings with all supervisors. Coaching.

Appendix C

Fire Service Leader Questionnaire

The questions below are part of a data collection process to identify the role of leadership as it relates to employee engagement. This research is part of a project I am required to complete as a student the Executive Fire Officer Program. In an effort to collect the data, I am asking your support by completing the questionnaire below. I thank you for your support in advance and I will gladly share the results upon completion.

1. In your opinion, what is employee engagement?

2. Does your organization value employee engagement? How so?

3. What role do you as a leader have with engaging the employees?

4. What behaviors do you as a leader believe is required to engage employees?

5. What steps have you and or your organization taken to engage employees?

Appendix D

Fire Service Leader Questionnaire Results

Question # 1

In your opinion, what is employee engagement?

100% of the respondents returned answers to this question. The following is a list of those

answers:

Job satisfaction. Feeling appreciated. Being informed about what is going on in the department.

Having a say in new policy. Being appreciated. Being valued. Have the ability to learn new

skills. Knowing what is going on from the top down.

Question # 2

Does your organization value employee engagement? How so?

100% of the respondents replied with "yes". The following is a list of those answers:

Through the implementation of new programs that provide for a better work environment. My

department actively participates in work group sessions regarding communication. Allowing

time off when needed. Organization makes attempts to build manager/employee relationships.

Question # 3

What role do you as a leader have with engaging the employees?

100% of the respondents replied with various means of engaging employees. The following is a

list of those answers:

To hold firefighters accountable for results. Communicate clearly on the emergency scene. Keep

other safe. Coach others to be better at their job. Recognize firefighters when a job is done well.

Lead by example. Being flexible and allowing employees to learn. Facilitate positive behavior

through guidance and direction.

Question # 4

What behaviors do you as a leader believe is required to engage employees?

100% of the respondents replied with answers associated with leadership behaviors required to engaging employees. The following is a list of the answers:

A good leader is one who is honest and committed to the team and the department. Being positive and taking action for good and poor performance. Honest and truthful. Have integrity and stand up for what is right. Be a role model for the crew. Be an effective communicator. Energize the team to do their best. Have compassion and listen to your employees.

Question # 5

What steps have you and or your organization taken to engage employees?

100% of the respondents replied with various means of engaging employees. The following is a list of those answers:

The department sought out and implemented training that builds relationships and partnerships among management and the field. A focus toward sharing the vision and mission of the department was shared from the top down. A two way communication group was formed and meets quarterly to discuss shared visions and ideas. A formal reward and recognition incentive was implemented to spotlight employees for performance.

Appendix E

DFWFD Leader Interviews

Questions and associated answers:

1. How would you describe your leadership style?

Answers:

- Field Training Officer

  1. Flexible and instructional allowing the firefighter to learn from mistakes.

- Captain

  1. Sometimes feels like a babysitter and has to provide specific instructions and watches others with a close eye.

- Battalion Chief

  1. Feels more like a manager than a leader except when operating at an emergency scene as incident commander. Methodical and prefers to handle situations one at a time.

- Assistant Chief

  1. Situational. Has attended situational leadership and understands the importance of handling projects and personnel based on their talents and personality.

2. What is your definition of employee engagement?

Answers:

- Field Training Officer

  o Communicating to all employees what they need to do as part of their job.

- Captain

- o Any person who does their job without being asked. Someone who is happy in their work and cooperates with me. Better communication.

- Battalion Chief

  - o The terminology the organization uses in an attempt to get everyone on the same page. Those employees who buy in to the concept and do tasks outside of their job description are said to be engaged. Communication up and down the chain.

- Assistant Chief

  - o Employee engagement is not just knowing what is expected, but also going above and beyond toward meeting the airport vision. Whatever can be done to bring about synergy and increased performance will engage the employees. Effective communication.

3. What is your role as a leader with employee engagement?

Answers:

- Field Training Officer

  - o My role is to train firefighters to drive fire apparatus and assure each understand the importance of building locations, airport roadways, and response procedures. I try to keep them out of trouble.

- Captain

  - o To make sure everyone in my station remains safe. To built trust among the team at the station; understanding everyone's strengths and weaknesses. Keep the family environment. Be fair and impartial.

- Battalion Chief

- o To lead by example and provide my shift with facts about what may be occurring within the fire department. Keep everyone safe. Build teamwork and mentor for operational excellence. Keep everyone informed and focused on the initiatives of the organization.

- Assistant Chief

  - o To foster the core values of the department. Demonstrate that senior management is in line with the airport's vision. Be involved, be consistent, and encourage others to do a good job. Encourage excellent performance. Be committed and dedicated to the organization.

4. What can the organization do to engage employees?

Answers:

- Field Training Officer

  - o We have always had really good equipment and apparatus so this helps a lot and is safe for our firefighters. Keeping everyone informed on what is coming down the pipe. Make sure we have the best compensation and benefits.

- Captain

  - o Enhanced training for everyone on employee engagement. Better rewards and recognition. Improve the performance measurement evaluation. True delegation and not just dumping things onto my plate.

- Battalion Chief

  - o Do a better job at hiring the right person for the job. The organization should involve me more on other projects outside my job description. Implement a

system that rewards those who excel and takes corrective action on those who are

status quo.

- Assistant Chief

  o Recognize employees for a job well done. Assign employees into positions that

    best fit their talents and abilities. Improve communication at the higher

    management levels. Consistent communication from the top.